



**CAMBRIDGESHIRE
& PETERBOROUGH**
COMBINED AUTHORITY

Agenda Item No: 6

Report title: Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Meeting Date: 27 September 2021

Public report: Yes

From: Robert Fox
Governance Officer

Recommendations: The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

a) discuss and agree items for the work programme and their prioritisation, and to comment as appropriate on what resources may be required.

b) discuss and agree a scoping document for future scrutiny reviews

1. Purpose

1.1 To request the committee to discuss and make suggestions on the work programme; and to discuss a potential template for a scoping document for future scrutiny reviews.

2. Background

2.1 In accordance with the Constitution, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee is responsible for setting its own work programme.

2.2 One of the recommendations from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny review carried out into the Overview and Scrutiny Committee arrangements suggested that an understanding of the new Mayor's emerging priorities should be sought to help inform the committees work programme and that regular informal work programming sessions should be held which would be informed by the Chair/Monitoring Officer/Mayor discussions.

2.3 At the last meeting of the Committee considered the four priorities the Mayor had discussed

with the Chair and Vice-Chair for the Committee:

- 1) Climate Change
- 2) Public Health
- 3) Financial fairness in the distribution of funds across the Combined Authority region.
- 4) The measure of compassion in the Mayor's policies

2.4 Whilst some indication of the Mayor's emerging priorities was welcomed more clarity was required around the emerging priorities and what delivery methods would be utilised for each.

2.5 In considering items for their work programme the Committee are requested to take into account the guidance published by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) 'Overview and scrutiny in combined authorities: a plain English guide' (Second Edition) which states:

"That where the Committee takes a rigorous approach to prioritising its work, and only placing items on the work programme where they will clearly add value, and where they relate to scrutiny's role, the work programme will reflect that exercise."

2.6 That guidance continues with a section on approaches to shortlisting topics which states when shortlisting topics these "should reflect scrutiny's overall role in the authority. This will require the development of bespoke, local solutions, however when considering whether an item should be included in the work programme". The kind of questions a scrutiny committee should consider, therefore, might include:

- Do we understand the benefits scrutiny would bring to this issue?
- How could we best carry out work on this subject?
- What would be the best outcome of this work?
- How would this work engage with the activity of the executive and other decision-makers, including partners?

2.7 Given the guidance in paragraphs 2.5 and 2.6 it is clear that the Committee should plan and manage their activities more effectively in order to ensure that there is ongoing development of the overview and scrutiny function. A key tenet of making improvements is to focus upon topic selection and produce more robust work programmes to underpin improved ways of working taking a realistic account of the resources available. Ultimately, Overview and Scrutiny Members will want to be in the position of exerting a proactive and positive influence upon what the Combined Authority does in practice.

2.8 There is general consensus among scrutiny practitioners that topics should be carefully selected taking into account common criteria to enable objective choices to be made, and work programmes devised that reflect a committee's capacity to deliver that programme as well as officers' capacity to support it in that task. The role of topic selection and work programmes was considered at the last meeting of the Committee where it was agreed that whilst more information on the Mayor's priorities is awaited it should move forward with its own agenda setting and the following future items were proposed as future items for consideration:

- Affordable housing

- The active travel agenda
- The devolution deal
- The CAM (particularly in relation to the financial implications of the cessation of the programme)
- E-scooters

2.9 As well as in-depth reviews and Task and Finish Groups there is scope for the Committee to receive briefings on policy and activity; fact finding visits, and round table discussions to ensure that Members are kept well informed about what is happening across the services covered by the Combined Authority.

2.10 As agreed at the last meeting of the Committee a template, attached at Appendix 1, has been developed for agreement of the Committee which can be used as a tool that should be compiled at the start of each inquiry to set out clearly the aims and objectives of the committee's involvement in a particular matter, and will be completed at the end of the inquiry to confirm what has been achieved. The form also acts an audit trail for a review. A scrutiny evaluation form could also be developed to understand what could have gone better; strengths and weaknesses of a particular approach used; recommendations for future reviews; whether the purpose of the review was achieved etc.

2.11 Appendix 1 will enable the Committee to fully consider the rationale behind a particular review. It is suggested that an initial meeting to set the Terms of Reference and key lines of enquiry for a review involving the Chair and/or Vice-Chair together with the lead member for the area of the review along with a minimum of two other Committee members, and the statutory scrutiny officer takes place to consider:

- Why should this topic be reviewed, and how the review aligns to the scrutiny objectives outlined in the MHCLG statutory guidance for Councils and Combined Authorities, 2019 CfGS scrutiny objectives?
 - provide constructive 'critical friend' challenge
 - amplify the voices and concerns of the public
 - be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
 - drive improvement in public services
- How clear is the influence that scrutiny can have on the review?
- What evidence is there to support the reasons and need for a scrutiny review?
- Consider the opportunities and challenges - How can local Members get involved as well as Districts/Boroughs

2.12 The last meeting of the Committee agreed that an item on affordable housing will be used as the prototype for the template at Appendix 1 prior to an item on this topic being brought to the Committee.

2.13 While an agreed work programme will assist in managing committee activity, it should be recognised that unforeseen matters will arise from time to time that will affect Members' ability to achieve the goals within an overall work programme.

3. Financial Implications

3.1 No financial implications

4. Legal Implications

4.1 No legal implications.

5. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Review Scoping Document